

FAIRY TALE PATTERNS IN THE POETRY OF CEZAR BALTAG

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Abstract: In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud argues that civilization was necessarily and tragically built on the suppression and sublimation of instinct. Cezar Baltag's world is one of conflicts he does not come to terms with, for which the poet finds no answers in a world of limits and limitations, hence his need to escape in his wandering for answers, in his quest for identity, into another one without limits, finality, closure. A deconstruction of the world, of reality, into fairy tales and into poems. He used fairy tales to project another world, one of psychological depth, without borders, a locus for his deep meanings to take roots, a world set free of constraints, of limits and limitations. The fertile ground of fairy tales was wisely used by Baltag in his poetry, with conscious intent, he entitled or subtitled some of his poems -pattern de basm/fairy tale pattern- taking his readers into a realm of multiple meanings.

Keywords: poetry, culture, fairy tales, myths, identity, collective imaginary

Cezar Baltag creates a lyric universe in which the mystical bonds between the material and the spiritual worlds need to be retied. The poet considers that it is necessary to follow his ancestors, to return to the roots, to folklore in order to re-create the broken bonds. The approach is rather intellectual combining ancient spells, formulas taken from children's folklore, characters taken from the Greek mythology, characters from the Judeo-Christian mythology. The solution sought is one formula of re-charming the world in order to keep the mystery of existence alive. There seem to be more ways to re-create the broken bond between heaven and earth: mythology, folklore, sensuality, spells, religion, poetry, etc.

Baltag's reliance on fairy tales is clearly seen in his volumes *Odihnă în țipăt*, *Madona din dud*, *Unicorn în oglindă*, *Dialog la mal*, as it becomes a major theme throughout his entire work, a means of internal liberation in a process of self-recognition. Depicting the rural and its realm, fairy tales become cultural documents he takes into account in his poetry. With the help of fairy tales he projected another world in his poems, one of psychological depth, the only one in which he could set himself free of all constraints, including political ones.

In an interview dating back to 1971, Cezar Baltag confessed: "M-am apropiat de folclor și pentru faptul că, în mod paradoxal, aprofundarea lui contrazice părerea comună despre simplitate." ("Another reason for which I turned to folklore is that, paradoxically, its in-depth study contradicts the common belief about simplicity.") He turns to folklore, investigating thus in the collective subconscious, using what he calls "pattern de basm" (fairy-tale pattern), creating his own fairy tales. With "pattern de basm" as a title or subtitle for some of his poems collected in the volume *Unicorn în oglinda*, he indicates from the very beginning the way the poem should be approached, as a fairy tale - which is a specific way for our people, and not only, to understand the world, its essence. Lost in the reflections of the mirror and of poetry, the poet looks for identity, for his true, inner self caught in a conflicting world, aware of its faults and also of the passage of time. He becomes a stranger in the outer world where he finds no answers to his questions, thus, he moves his quest inwards.

Rooted in fairy tales, some of his poems are a way of re-charming the world, of finding its essence; such a poem is *Fata din dafin* (*The Girl in the Bay Tree*) included in the collection *Unicorn în oglindă* (*Unicorn in the Looking Glass*):

Fata din dafin

*”Ea trece ca o corabie
cu catargele evaporate
naufragiază pe o mare de camfor
de unde
nu se mai poate
întoarce*

The Girl in the Bay Tree

*She sails like a ship
with no masts
she sails on a sea of camphor
from where
she can no longer
return*

Nervii ei sunt raze, inima ei

*e un nod de lemn
împrejurul ei e o secetă
înăuntrul ei o fântână.
În fântână doarme un șarpe.
Din fruntea șarpelui curge o stea.*

Her veins are sunrays, her heart

*a crux of wood
around her is dryness
within her a well.
The well is nesting a snake.
The snake has a star on its head.*

Ea aude cântând cocoșii

*departe
în scoarța copacilor
Auzul ei e o iederă
genele ei foșnesc
ea aprinde o gură de frunze
vorbele ei sunt vrăbii:*

She hears the song of roosters

*far away
in the trees
Her hearing an ivy
her lashes a rustling
her mouth just leaves
her words are sparrows:*

Deschide-te, Dafine, deschide-te,

Dafine, deschide-te,

Dafine

Open-up, Bay tree, open-up Bay tree, open-up,

Baytree

Dar Dafinul nu o mai aude

Bay tree hears her no more

Și ea trece ca o corabie

cu pânzele evaporate

naufragiază pe o mare de camfor

de unde

nu se mai poate

întoarce” (Baltag 1975: 35)

She sails like a ship

with no masts

she sails on a sea of camphor

from where

she can no longer

return (my translation)

The girl from the bay tree, a fairy tale character, by coming out from the bay tree and descending into the real world loses her way back to her magic world. The impossibility of return shows the rupture between the two worlds. The symbols associated with her have sacred meanings : *the ship* (corabia) – Noah’s arch, a symbol of salvation, *the rays* (razele) – light as a sign of knowledge, *the wood* (lemnul) – stands for warmth, life, *the well* (fântâna) - is a representation of wisdom, *the snake* (șarpele) – a dual symbol, able to reveal wisdom, *the roosters* (cocoșii) – stand for the passage of time, the coming of morning, warning the girl it is time for her to return to her magic world.

Another poem entitled *In illo tempore*, in the same collection of poems, is subtitled *pattern de basm (fairy-tale pattern)*:

In Illo Tempore

„Unde

timpul și numele

Într-o zi

cît alții într-un an

Și dacă văzu că nu are încotro:

–Mă duc eu, tată

Și plesni de trei ori din palme

In Illo Tempore

Where

the time and the name

One day

as others in a year

And seeing no other way:

- I will go, father

And clapped three times

| | |
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| <i>și se prefăcu...</i> | <i>and turned into...</i> |
| - <i>Să mă scoți la lumea albă...</i> | - <i>Take me out into the Sun...</i> |
| <i>ca vântul ca gândul</i> | <i>like the wind like a thought</i> |
| - <i>Ia te uită înapoi, frate</i> | - <i>Look behind, my brother</i> |
| <i>și spune-mi ce vezi...</i> | <i>tell me what you see...</i> |
| | |
| - <i>Doamne, dar greu somn</i> | - <i>God, deep sleep</i> |
| <i>am mai</i> | <i>did I</i> |
| <i>dormit</i> | <i>sleep</i> |
| | |
| <i>cu totul și cu totul de aur</i> | <i>where everything was gold</i> |
| <i>Iar eu am încălecat pe o șa</i> | <i>And so my story ends</i> |
| <i>și v-am spus” (Baltag 1975: 113)</i> | <i>as told (my translation)</i> |

This poem is a fairy tale itself. The title sets the action *in illo tempore*, where everything is possible, where, without *time and name*, everything is reduced to its essence, to true knowledge. It keeps with the fairy tale frame, beginning *in illo tempore* and ending with the fairy tale formula *”Iar eu am încălecat pe o șa/ și v-am spus //”* leaving the reader to reflect upon its content and share its meanings.

Another re-working of the fairy tale is the poem *La Pod (At the Bridge)*:

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>La pod</i> | <i>At the Bridge</i> |
| <i>„Tată</i> | <i>Father</i> |
| <i>de atâtea ori visat</i> | <i>so many times dreamt</i> |
| <i>de atâtea ori uitat</i> | <i>so many times forgotten</i> |
| | |
| <i>iar te depărtezi</i> | <i>you go away</i> |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>iar te apropii</i> | <i>you come again</i> |
| <i>Ai trecut de mine</i> | <i>You passed by me</i> |
| <i>rămâi în urmă</i> | <i>you stay behind</i> |
| <i>îți schimbi înfățișarea</i> | <i>you change your looks</i> |
| <i>o iei pe un drum ascuns</i> | <i>you go around another way</i> |
| <i>și iar</i> | <i>then again</i> |
| <i>îmi ieși înainte la pod</i> | <i>come before me at the bridge</i> |
| <i>mereu îmi ieși înainte</i> | <i>always before me</i> |
| <i>ca să mă sperii</i> | <i>to scare me</i> |
| <i>și să pot trece</i> | <i>so to pass</i> |
| <i>de pragul în flăcări</i> | <i>the treshold in flames</i> |
| <i>al basmului”</i> | <i>of the tales (my translation)</i> |

We have here the image of the father as the one who helps the son in his struggle of becoming. Metamorphosis and the fluidity of time and space help the hero on his way. The bridge is not only one as it appears in *Harap Alb (The White Moor)*, but different stages on the way towards true knowledge. The passage into the world of fairy tales is represented by fire, a symbol of change, of renewal.

His collection of poems entitled *Unicorn în oglindă/Unicorn in the Looking Glass* is magic. Its vision, metaphors, music, all refer to metaphysics, selfreflexivity and the process of becoming. The self, identity, become relative concepts reflected in a multitude of mirrors. A dissolving of the subject seen as centre of the world and a progression towards a relative self that knows it is a relative self, a proliferation of roles.

Trapped in a deceitful reality, which offers no answers, no meanings, the poet engages in a different search, an inner one.

His poem *De la capăt* (*From the Beginning*) included also in *Dialog la mal* (*Dialogue on the Bank*) is an *ars poetica*:

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>De la capăt</i> | <i>From the Beginning</i> |
| “Știa că are chip și nu-l mai găsea | He knew he has a face and he couldn't find it |
| și nu-și mai găsea nici mâinile | and he couldn't find his hands either |
| cu care să-l caute | to look for his face |
| Știa că are ochi | He knew he had eyes |
| Și nu-i mai găsea | And he couldn't find them |
| și nu-și mai găsea nici pleoapele | he couldn't find his eyelids either |
| care să-l apere | to protect him |
| Știa că are un drum | He knew about his way |
| și nu-l mai găsea | and he couldn't find it |
| și nu-și mai găsea nici tălpile | he couldn't find his soles either |
| cu care să-l caute | to look for it |
| | |
| <i>Atunci și-a auzit inima</i> | <i>Then he heard his heart</i> |
| <i>înăuntrul unei fântâni</i> | <i>within a well</i> |
| <i>și-a coborât înăuntrul ei</i> | <i>and went down in</i> |
| <i>și și-a recâștigat calul și spada</i> | <i>regained his horse and sword</i> |
| <i>Ca fulgerul</i> | <i>A lightening pouring</i> |
| <i>într-un ulcior celest</i> | <i>from a divine pot</i> |
| <i>Ca bobul de grâu care se trezește în pământ</i> | <i>A grain that germinates the earth</i> |
| <i>și își reamintește dintr-o dată</i> | <i>and suddenly remembers</i> |
| <i>de la capăt</i> | <i>from the beginning</i> |
| <i>toată povestea”</i> | <i>the entire story (my translation)</i> |

This poem is a Deleuzian becoming animal, that is, a body of matter and energy, where there are no specialized tissues for separate organs – in other words, a formless mass prior to symbolization. Prince Charming, the archetypal hero, is seeking for his face (recognizable form) and for his organs (eyes, hands, soles) which are being formed as a sort of materialization of his desire. He wishes them into being, he imagines them into being. His becoming mimics Creation (*A lightning pouring/from a divine pot*). The supreme form of existence is the narrative of one's own life, the territorialization of material reality into a book.

By deconstructing reality, his poems become a locus for the spiritual search of meanings, of identity, he builds his own imaginary world to resolve his conflicts and answer his questions. He uses his poetry to interpret and elucidate existence, his poems become a verbal organizing corresponding to a spiritual content: "*Cuvântul este principiul verbal suprem ce susține 'toate lumile'*" (Baltag 1996:7) ("The word is the ultimate verbal element at the basis of 'all possible worlds'") argued Cezar Baltag in *Paradoxul semnelor*, connecting it to the Bible and its „*La început a fost Cuvântul și Cuvântul era la Dumnezeu și Cuvântul era Dumnezeu.*" (At the beginning there was the Word and the Word belonged to God and the Word was God.") his search for words is also a search for God, for identity and since God resides inside us, his search is an inner one, into the depths of his being, away from the external world of representation as stated in his poem *Ocultare* from the volume *Chemarea numelui*:

*"Pur? Aventura ia sfârșit
o dată
cu puritatea.*

*Îngerul n-așteaptă.
De nu l-ai înfruntat la prima treaptă
urci și tot urci o scară de nămol
și nu mai întâlnești nici un simbol*

*Pure? The adventure is over
once
with purity.*

*The Angel waits no more.
If not confronted at the start
you climb and climb a a stair of mud
no symbol in your way*

*Să fie-o ușă, poate, în ne-gând
un prag mai aspru
un zăvor mai sfânt
și dincolo de pragul ei curat
să fie chipul tău adevărat?*

*A door,
maybe, not in the thought
a stronger hold
a holier bolt
and beyond its treshold
might your true face be hold?*

*Cuvintele s-ar stinge dacă-n rugă
n-ar fi atrase de un punct de fugă,
acolo în adânc
tăcerea arde
și Dumnezeu în toate se împarte
și ca-n oglindă
dincolo de lume
El brusc își stinge ultimul lui Nume
Orbim
și facem calea înapoi
și nu mai știm că l-am ascuns în noi*

*The words would dissappear
if they were not connected in a prayer
deep there
the silence burning
and God is everywhere
and like in mirror
beyond the world
He suddenly silences his Name
We see no more
and back we go
forgetting we have Him in us hidden*

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>În jarul și cenușa din cuvinte mă-îngroapă, Doamne, să te pot aprind</i> (Baltag 1995:20)</p> | <p><i>In burning truthful words you lost me, God, so I can speak of you</i> (my translation)</p> |
|---|--|

The poet himself is a creator of worlds through words, and the poem a use of words for deeper meanings. In his process of creation he uses not only words but also their music, as seen in his volume *Madona din dud*, so much imbued with folklore, when words were sung, becoming more than just words. We can well place this volume next to Ion Barbu's *Isarlâc*, Tudor Arghezi's *Flori de mucegai* or Anton Pann's writings.

With his appeal to folklore, fairy tales, games, rhymes, musicality, the poet tries to set the balance right, to compensate for the tension created by conflicts, game-like, inviting us not to take anything for granted, but to question it, for there is always more, a plurality of meanings.

His poetry poses no finality, but a wandering for answers, a quest for true identity, no closure at all, but a continuous becoming. He has a postmodern approach of re-use and collage, of recycling elements of tradition in his poetry.

As we have seen, Cezar Baltag used fairy tales and folklore to enrich and give a distinctive flavour to his writings. Much used and abused, fairy tales remain a rich soil to be exploited.

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